



MDE Recommends

PARENT/STUDENT PROBLEM SOLVING Suggested Steps for Resolving Problems and Complaints

Step 1. Clearly IDENTIFY the problem.

Answering the following questions will help you clarify the problem for both yourself and those who can help you solve the problem. It is helpful to write down the answers for use as a reference when discussing your complaint.

- What happened, or what is the problem?
- Who was involved? (names, titles, school, student or students)
- Where did the problem occur?
- When did the problem occur?
- Why did the problem occur?
- How does the problem affect me, and how does it affect my child?
- What steps should I take to get the problem resolved?
- Who can help solve the problem? (names, titles, school or district of employment)
- What is an acceptable solution?

Step 2. REVIEW local district regulations, policies, and procedures.

Reviewing the following types of information will help you determine whether any specific rights or policies were violated. This information might also help you answer some of the questions in step one.

- district policies and administrative regulations
- student code of conduct or discipline policy
- school district grievance procedures

Michigan law guarantees you access to this information, which should be available at your local school, local board of education, or central administrative office. Note the school district's policy regarding the appropriate chain of command and any time limits on when a complaint can be filed. For most school districts the chain of command is: teacher, principal, superintendent, and then local board of education.

Step 3. COMMUNICATE your complaint.

Once you have clearly identified the problem and decided whether a specific policy has been violated, it is time to communicate your concerns by writing or speaking to the appropriate person. Be sure to include all pertinent information in your letter or conversation, including the answers to the questions in step one.

In order to resolve the issue as quickly as possible, it is usually best to first try to resolve the issue directly with the person with whom there is a problem (e.g. teacher, coach, counselor). If there is a need to communicate your



MDE Recommends

concerns to others, follow the appropriate chain of command until the issue is resolved. You might also consider meeting with a neutral third party to discuss the situation. This person may include a counselor, mediator, community affairs officer or ombudsman.

Step 4. Keep *RECORDS* of your communications.

It is important to keep records of all correspondence and conversations you have with individuals during the communication process. If a solution is reached, put in writing and follow up to be sure that the appropriate steps are taken. If you are unable to resolve your problem, these records will be very helpful should you decide to take further action.

While the Department of Education can inform school districts of parental complaints, we have limited authority in matters of a local school district since districts are autonomous and governed by a local board of education. Each local board has the authority to make reasonable regulations necessary for the proper establishment, maintenance and management of the public schools of the district.

This information is provided as a service of the Michigan Department of Education and is distributed with the understanding that the Department is not engaged in rendering legal advice. Those individuals desiring or requiring legal advice should seek the services of an attorney.